

# Enhancing Engagement, Discovering Strengths and Culture, and Talking about Problems

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Anthony Irsfeld, Ph.D.  
Toni DuBrino, MA

Communities of Care  
Training and Learning Collaborative

# Scavenger Hunt Exercise

Families raising youth with SED often find themselves having to work with many different providers:



## Challenges Families Face when working with multiple providers

- Feeling *"caught in the middle"* when different providers are giving different recommendations, suggestions and/or state agency mandates
- Feeling *anxious or concerned* (or in extreme situations, *hopeless*) when different providers are in conflict with one another
- Feeling *"not listened to"* when providers attempt to meet with each other to improve their collaboration, but do not include the family
- Feeling *exposed* or even *intimidated* when attending meetings with providers
- Feeling *discouraged* and *frustrated* with "one size fits all" models

## Core Value Based Competencies

- Child Centered and Family Driven
- Collaborative and Integrated
- Culturally Responsive
- Strength Based
- Continuous Quality Improvement

# Child Centered and Family Driven

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We have found this to be the  
*best*  
method of Engagement

## Different Approaches

- The Expert Approach: the responsibility for analyzing the problem, figuring out the causes, and coming up with solutions all rests with the professional (expert). Tends to rely exclusively on professional knowledge.
- The Collaborative Approach: responsibility is shared between the family and the professional(s). Both bring *complementary* knowledges (professional and experiential) and strive to combine them to generate positive change.

## A Day In the Life ...

- The take home message here is that sometimes a parent who walks through your door may seem angry, depressed, feeling hopeless, etc. This exercise takes you through a “Day in the life” of a parent raising youth with behavioral and emotional challenges and how that can impact them over time
- A good large group exercise



## “I just can't take it anymore...”

- This can be a humorous, non-threatening way to help participants understand the apparently “disproportionate negative responses” that workers sometimes feel from parents
- The take home message here is that struggles and set backs can be cumulative. This exercise can illustrate why at times family members can seem very upset over the smallest issues—it is because it isn't just about *this* issue (i.e. that one rock)—but the cumulative effects of struggles and set backs over a long period of time.



## In order to Collaborate, we need to appreciate two important types of “Knowledge”

### Professional Knowledge:

- Comes from formal education and training
- Comes from experience gained through your professional role
- Comes from scientific or “objective” sources— research, books, articles

### Experiential Knowledge:

- Comes from lived experience — not a professional role
- What is it like to live in *this specific family*, with *this specific child*, with *these specific values and culture*, in *this specific neighborhood*



## Getting the Family Experience into the Classroom

There is a difference between our intentions to help and the experience of that help

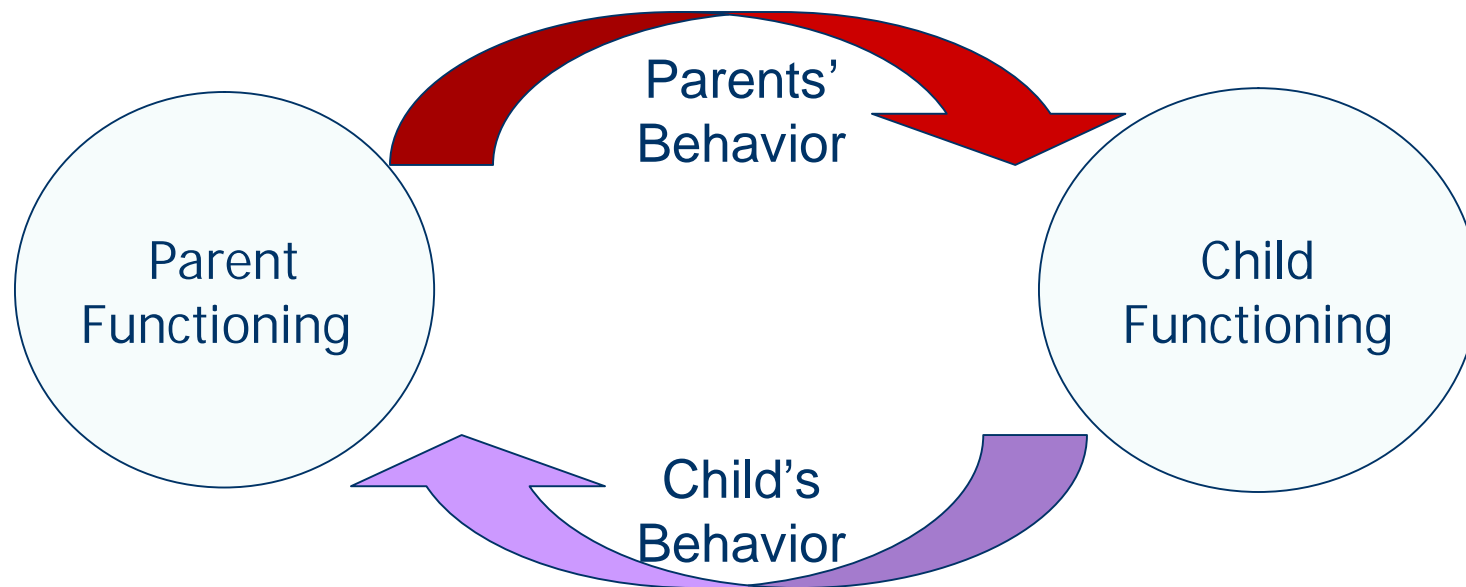
- Training and Learning Collaborative Model
- Parent / Caregiver Panels
- Youth Panels
- Guest Lecturers
- Family Quotes and stories
- Exercises ("A Day in the Life")

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS ...

"It's just like someone has died because this is not our little girl any more. I dread people asking how our kids are doing. What can I say? When I look at the family album, I see the family we could have been and were supposed to be. The future looks bleak and full of worry. We really don't look forward to much any more; this takes up so much of our time and energy."

*-from Grillo, L., Meaney, D., & Rich, C. (1999).*

# Empathizing with the Parenting Experience enhances Engagement



Raising a child with challenging needs can impact parent functioning

- Decreased Self Esteem
- Depression / Anxiety
- Shame / Embarrassment
- Loss of Patience; Increased irritability
- Strains on other family relationships– including marriages



## Entering into working relationships

- Recognize and accept as legitimate different levels of motivation for change: “get you off my back” → “get me services” → “help me change”
- “Apathy,” “hostility”, or “resistance” are characteristics of our working relationship with the family, not characteristics of family members
- Recognize that cooperation is developmental and grows slowly over time
- If you sense lack of “motivation,” attempt to understand it...(previous bad experiences? unfounded fears? afraid of feeling blamed?)
- Listen to the reasons behind the anger with genuine curiosity—ask about it—get the “story behind the feelings”
- Resist temptation to defend the system if the family expresses anger, hostility towards them—validate that you hear them ... that is not the same as agreeing with them
- Ask what has helped them get through the anger in the past...what has helped them cope with these feelings all this time?

## Engagement is Influenced by ALL Interactions

- All interactions produce experience
- The result of any interaction can be either a positive or negative experience
- Multiple negative experiences, however small, unintended or seemingly insignificant, tend to increase resistance, hopelessness, and defensiveness over time
- Multiple positive experiences, however small, unintended or seemingly insignificant, tend to increase hope and collaboration and reduce defensiveness over time

There is no such thing as an “Innocent” interaction



# The Benefits of Transparency

- There are all sorts of ways both intended and unintended we are inclined to keep our process of working with a family hidden from them
- The more transparent our work, the more families tend to feel like partners in the process – rather than feeling like work is being done “to them”
- Be honest and transparent about your process – including paperwork, notes, assessments, etc.
- Give the family choices whenever possible
- Abusive and Violent contexts may require some secrecy – compromise transparency only when necessary to keep everyone safe
- Regularly solicit family comments on how you are doing your job

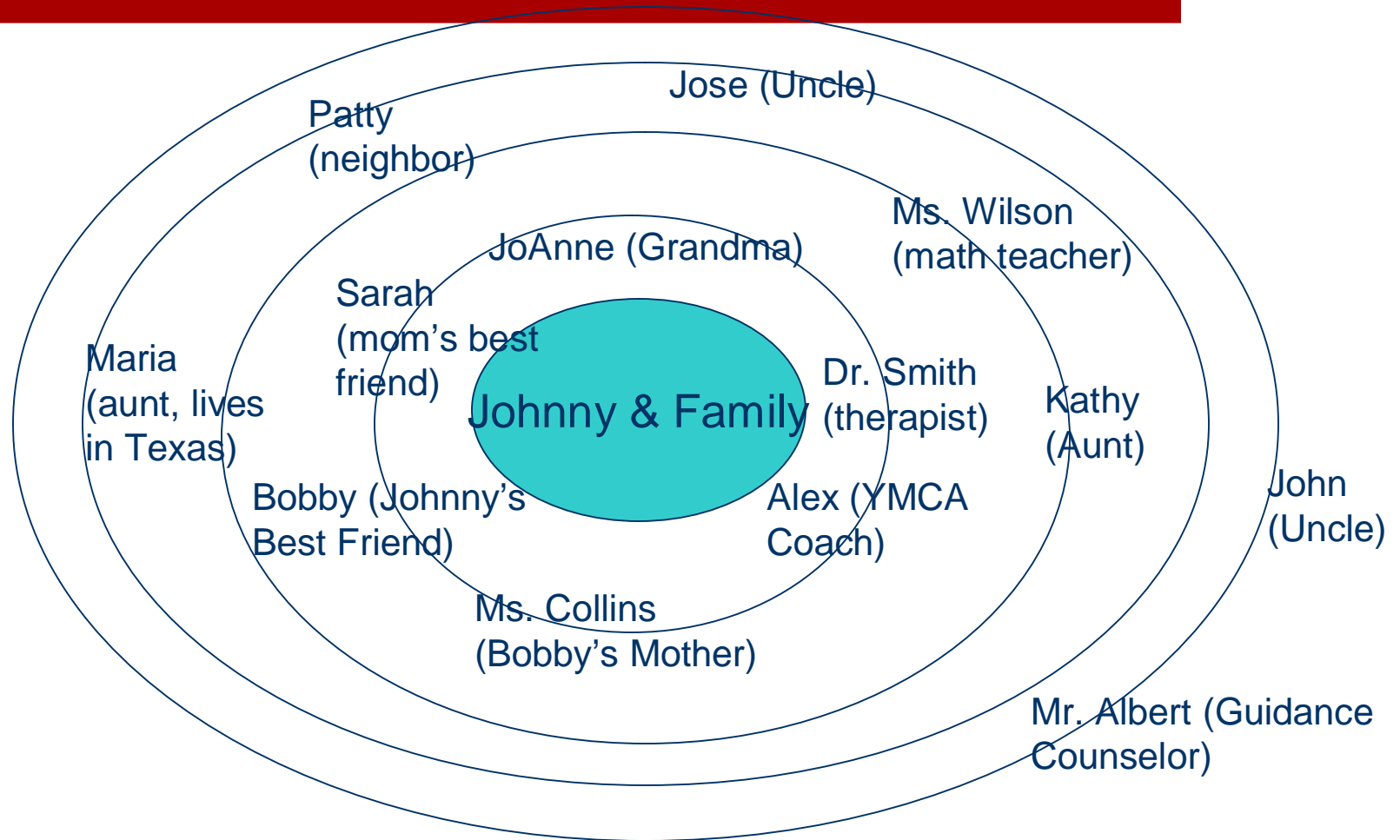
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## The 3 Principles of Team Building

- 1 Family Members are the most important Team members
- 2 Families should exercise control over Team membership
- 3 Team membership should include not only providers but natural supports as well

# Circle Exercise

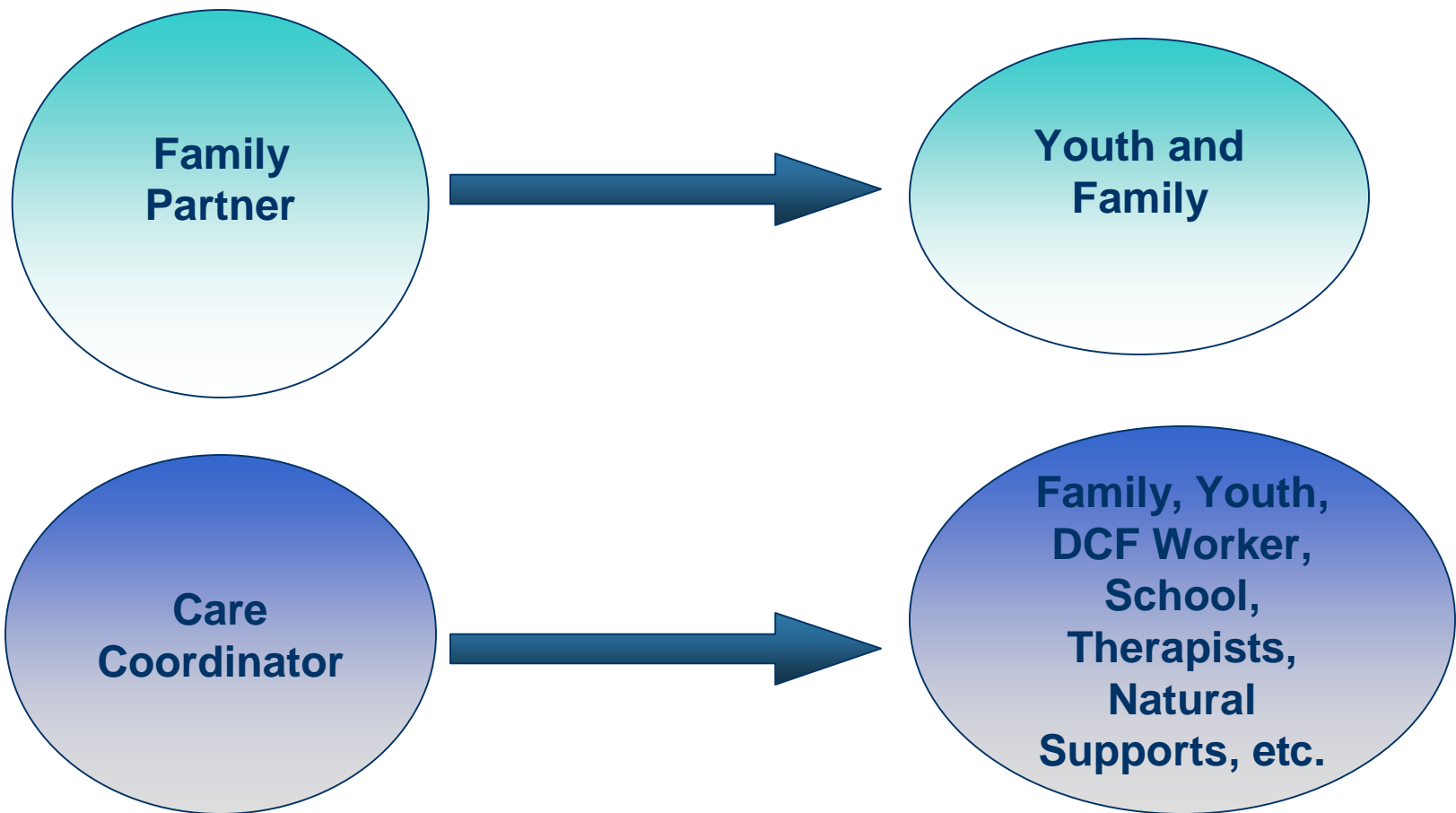


# How do you define family?



- Small group exercise that can be used as an icebreaker, or team building exercise
- Best used to highlight the need to avoid assumptions when building Teams
- Divide into small groups and ask participants to share:
  - Who was “in their family” growing up
  - What the role of extended family was
  - What the role of close friends or neighbors were
- Illustrates the different ways people define “family” both in the past (when they were growing up) and in the present

## Different but Complementary Focus



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# Culturally Responsive

- Subjective lived experience is respected and valued
- Families define important aspects of the work: their planning team, who constitutes “family,” the priorities of the work, what solutions are likely to work or fail
- Workers animate the attitude of a “student” – humility and a desire to be taught by the family – Bill Madsen’s “respectful curiosity”
- While families can sometimes share broad ethnic or racial group characteristics, each family has its own culture about which we must be educated
- Problems and challenges (and their potential solutions) must be viewed in the broader neighborhood and societal contexts (i.e. racism)



# Cultural Awareness Exercise

- Sensitizes participants to individual differences in culture, values, and ethnicity
- The idea here is to help participants move away from pre-conceived concepts of “normal” and begin to develop an attitude of humility in the face of such wide ranging diversity
- The exercise works best with a diverse audience. Be cautious about using with a homogeneous group, as you may then reinforce stereotypical attitudes and beliefs



## Culture Stereotype Exercises

- Present scenarios and encourage honest disclosure about assumptions and attitudes
- Promotes increased self-awareness about our assumptions and how they are manifested in our work

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## Myths Regarding Strength Based Work

- Strength Based work is basically trying to “look on the bright side”
- I always have to be “optimistic”—always looking for the “silver lining”
- Being strength based is about being nice and friendly
- I have to like everyone I work with
- Doing my job well means doing “whatever the family wants”

## The Process of Talking about Strengths and Culture...

- helps reduce feelings of failure
- helps increase hopefulness which can lead to greater motivation for positive change
- helps families feel like whole individuals — not just a collection of symptoms or problems
- helps build positive working partnerships

## The Content of Strengths and Culture Conversations....

- helps to “individualize” planning, and therefore more relevant to the child and family
- helps the family feel that their values are respected and understood
- helps educate and sensitize the worker to their own cultural stereotypes and pre-conceived ideas and thus minimize potential misunderstandings and offenses

## What are Strengths

(..... and how do I find them)

- Hopes & Dreams
- Talents
- Interests, Hobbies
- Family / Cultural Celebrations
- Any positive story when “something good” happened
- “Hanging In” and/or Coping

## Example “Conversation Starters”

- Holidays, Important Cultural Celebrations
- What they admire, respect, like, about each other?
- What do you value the most? What do you believe in no matter what?
- In what ways are people already kept safe? What needs are currently being met and how?
- What do they like and respect about others outside of the family (this can lead to potential resources or people to invite to future sessions to help when things feel stuck)?
- Who are your heroes (real and abstract) and why?
- What do you want to be when you grow up? Where do you want to be in 1 year, 5 years, 10 years? What are your dreams for the future?
- What do you like to do with your free time?
- What are people's talents and skills? Favorite school subjects, hobbies, interests.
- What's the best gift you have ever been given?
- What was the happiest time with your family? Outside of your family?
- What are people's hopes for the future– what do they want to do well or better?
- How has everyone hung in until now?
- What is good about living in this family?



## Moving from the General ...

### General

- Likes to ride bikes
- Likes video games
- Likes History at school
- Likes rock music
- Gets along well with his grandmother
- Wants to be a lawyer when he grows up

## ... to the Specific

- Has an old, hand-me-down bike he got from a friend, but wants a new one (feels this one is too small for him.) He doesn't think he can afford it, but he is saving his money to buy a new Dawes Haymaker 1200 Mountain Bike. He likes to ride bikes with his friends– especially Jerry. They generally ride around and through the park near his house, but not around the neighborhood because older kids will steal their bikes.
- Likes to play video games, but doesn't do this with friends, mostly when he is by himself. He doesn't like games which have you compete against your friends, but likes the “role playing” games in which you challenge the computer.
- Enjoys History (he thinks it is like listening to stories), but he has trouble remembering all the dates. He hates Algebra and Reading (he likes to read children's books for little kids) and thinks he would be good teaching little kids to read.
- Likes Rock Music. His favorite bands are Motley Crue, Linkin Park, and the Foo Fighters.
- Gets along well with her grandmother. He has good memories of when she used to baby-sit him when his mom was working. She used to let him stay up with her and watch TV at night.
- Says he wants to be a lawyer so he can make lots of money and help people.

# Talking about Problems (the “flip side” of strength-based)

Narrative and Solution Focus Approaches

# Problem Focus vs. Vision Focus

- Usually our attention is drawn to “problems” as the things that are “wrong” or the things that we want to see “stopped.” (Problem Focus)
- In order to create positive change, it is best to attempt to translate what we want to see stopped into “what do we want to achieve” (Vision Focus)

## Exceptions exist alongside “problems”

Exceptions provide the “clues” to possible solutions:

### Exceptions in Time:

- Have there been times when the problem has taken less of a toll on you, your family? Is this the worst it has ever been? If yes, what was it like before? If no, how is it better now?

### Exceptions in Situation:

- In what situations does this problem have less influence? How are you different in those situations?
- What makes for a good day? (specifically)

### Exceptions in Point of View:

- Who thinks the best of you, your family, etc.?
- What does it say about you that you are here and trying to get help — even when nothing yet has worked?

# Language is Important

## Internalizing

- He *is* impulsive
- She *is* Bi-polar
- They are abusive

## Externalizing

- He ***acts*** impulsively at times
- She ***lives with*** Bi-polar Disorder
- They are behaving abusively in these situations

# Problems as Needs

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Possible Need</u>
There is a lot of yelling and fighting in the home.	The family needs ways to interact with each other more positively.
Dad criticizes his kids all the time. They can do nothing right.	Dad needs ways to cope with his fears that his children will be taken advantage of in the world.
Mom hits her children when they disobey.	Mom needs ways to get her kids to listen to her and feel more control in her household.

## Think of Problems as Constraints

We can think of problems as constraints: what constrains this parent (child, couple, family, etc.) from doing things differently?

Constraints can exist at multiple levels:

- Biological (i.e. attentional problems)
- Psychological (i.e. emotional effects of trauma)
- Family (i.e. destructive patterns of communication)
- Social Network (i.e. isolation from extended family, stigma in the local neighborhood)
- Social Cultural Context (i.e. racism)



# Group Discussion

- As you consider modifying your curricula, in what ways do you believe your program is particularly strong?
- What areas will need the most attention?
- What would be a beginning list of “next steps” to consider?

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